

## The Other Potter 2: Fear

### Chapter One

Hollinda Alyssum Potter, age fourteen, was friendsick. She was schoolsick and brothersick. She was sick of being trapped at this stupid orphanage without her magic or her best friends, the nefarious Weasley twins.

Mrs. D'Oro, the owner of Goldwell Orphanage, refused to let Holly leave her "home" to visit the Weasleys. In Holly's frustration, she had nearly lost control of her magic and Mrs. D'Oro had avoided an encounter with Holly's sharpest knitting needles.

At the moment, Holly was knitting furiously in her favorite chair. She had piles of yarn surrounding her and about two yards of purple scarf was tangled around her legs.

There was a knock on the door. Emmit Umber came in. His face was stony when he said, "You've got mail. It's from your *boyfriend*." He threw the letter at her and stormed out. Emmit had always harbored a crush on Holly, but when he heard of the so called boyfriend (a rather optimistic term), he had turned cold on her.

Every inch of Holly's letter was slathered in stamps. There was a small white label pasted on the front with Holly's name and address on it. Holly peeled several stamps off the back and opened the envelope.

*Dear Holly,*

*Enclosed is a letter for your orphanage to let you visit. There is also a letter from the twins.*

*With love,*

*The Weasleys.*

Holly grinned. She slipped her hand into the envelope, pulled out the letter for Mrs. D'Oro, and then the one from the twins.

*Holls,*

*Harry is here, and he says hi. We are in very deep dragon dung because we rescued him, but we'll tell you about that when you get here.*

*Mum is insisting on taking your measurements for a Weasley sweater. We had to show her a few photographs of last year with us all in our sweaters, and that caused a lot of chaos around the breakfast table, especially considering your sweater could've passed for a dress. We hope you've grown some.*

*Every time Harry walks into a room, Ginny breaks something. It's sickening. She'll be starting school this year.*

*We're working on more joke shop material. Can't say what, but it's amazing. Wish you could see.*

*Wish you were here,*

*Gred and Forge*

Holly was over the moon. She was leaving; she was going to see her best friends. She kicked off her knitting and scrambled off to find Mrs. D'Oro, to show her the last letter.

Fear

Hurt

Her stupid boyfriend.

He was sick of being ignored. He had liked Holly since they were nine, and then she gets into boarding school and comes back with a boyfriend.

Why didn't she like him? What was wrong with him? Was it just that she was never there?

Before Holly left, she was the daydreamer. She told stories to the little kids. She fought with the boys when they wanted a fight. She gave advice to the older kids. She was the ultimate girl, and Emmet adored her for that.

Holly had her own bookcase, something no other kid there had. Emmet had often gone in there under the pretense of borrowing a book, just trying to see her.

And her boyfriend was in the middle of them. It was terrible. What did he have that Emmet hadn't? It hurt.

It hurt a lot.

## Chapter 3

### To the Burrow

Holly fell out of the fireplace. She gave a violent sneeze and sat up. “I *hate* Floo powder,” said Holly to herself. “It’s worse than carsickness.”

She stood up and brushed the ashes back into the fireplace. She had no clue if she was in the right place. She glanced around.

If she was lucky, this appeared to be the Weasley’s kitchen. Holly’s eyes were drawn to a clock on the mantelpiece. It had the name of a Weasley on each hand, which instead of two, carried nine. Strangely enough, the twins’ hands were pointing at “Work.

Mrs. Weasley’s hand was pointing at, “Home.”

“Excuse me?” called Holly. “Fred, George, Mrs. Weasley?”

A short, plump woman came into the kitchen. She had flaming red hair and a pile of laundry in her arms. On seeing Holly, she set the clothes down on the table and said, “Hello? Are you Holly?”

Holly nodded. “Good,” said Mrs. Weasley. “Ms. Bagshot told us you’d be arriving today. I’m the twins’ mother. Have you got your stuff?”

Almost on cue, Holly’s trunk fell out of the fireplace. Holly lifted it up and brushed the ashes carefully back into the fireplace. By the look of things, Mrs. Weasley didn’t need anymore work.

“Wonderful,” said Mrs. Weasley. “You’ll be bunking with Ginny. I don’t think you’ve met her, just a moment, please. Ginny!”

A girl who looked about eleven appeared. She had the red Weasley hair and brown eyes. “Mum?” Ginny asked.

“Ginny, this is Harry’s sister. You’ve heard of her. She’ll be staying with you.”

Ginny’s face brightened a bit. “Your owl wouldn’t leave. I guess I know why now.”

“Attie’s a weird owl,” agreed Holly. The bird had a strange liking for green beans.

“Well, come on,” said Ginny. “I’m on the third floor. Do you need help with the trunk?”

Holly grinned. Ginny was much smaller than her. “No thanks, Ginny, I’ve got it.” She tugged on the handle and staggered across the kitchen floor.

“Are you sure you don’t need help?” Ginny asked Holly on the stairs. Holly was red in the face.

“No, we’re almost there, aren’t we?” said Holly. She pushed the trunk up another stair.

“Yeah, we’re nearly there,” said Ginny. She led Holly up the stairs and to the left. Ginny opened the door and something large, tan, and white flew out. “You said her name’s Attie, right?”

“Athena. Attie’s her nickname. Ouch! Watch the beak!” said Holly as the Barn Owl nipped her face. “You’re the one who didn’t come back!”

Athena hooted angrily and flew off to the attic. Ginny grinned and led Holly inside. “Fred and George are in their room. If you hear bangs, just follow them.”

Holly nodded and pushed her trunk into the corner. “We’re going to Diagon Alley in a few days,” added Ginny. “Mum told me to ask if you had your letter before you got here.”

“Yeah, I did. Thanks Ginny.” Holly took in the room. There was a bunk bed pushed against the wall. Next to it was a bedside table with a small leather-bound book on it. She had a large bookcase and sticking out from between two books was a small scrap of parchment with a doodle of a small figure with glasses. Her window looked out over the garden and Holly noted the small garden gnomes sneaking around.

“Do you want the top or bottom bunk?” asked Ginny.

“Whichever you don’t want,” said Holly. She didn’t really care. Everything about this summer was turning out perfect.

## Friends

Holly unpacked her stuff with little to no interruption while Ginny sat on the bottom bunk scrawling in the pink leather book. Holly thought pink just didn't seem to match Ginny. She looked more like pale blue. She also noticed that the page the eleven-year-old was writing in was almost at the very back.

Holly didn't keep a diary. She kept a cat. The plush animal was now very old and worn. Its expression tended to change depending on Holly's mood. The cat was now winking happily. Holly put Kitty on the top bunk.

When her clothes were put away and her letter stacked neatly on top of Athena's cage, Holly set out to find the twins. She listened to resounding bangs and echoes and followed them. Unfortunately, it was just the ghoul in the attic. The ghoul took the time out of his 'busy' schedule to pop up behind her and make her fall down the stairs, swearing all the way.

Holly probably would've cracked her head open had it not been for the two nearly identical boys at the foot of the stairs, who loyally broke her fall.

"What colorful language," said Fred.

"Splendid," said George rubbing his head.

"Nice to see you too," said Holly sarcastically. "My summer was great; except for the fact my neighbor's been stalking me."

"Brilliant. Get off my leg and tell us more," said Fred.

"Stalking you?" said George mildly.

Holly stood up and helped Fred and George get to their feet. "Where are we?" she asked.

"Stalking you?" repeated George, his arms crossed.

"Don't go playing the overprotective boyfriend," said Holly.

"I am not," said George.

Fred made a sound that he covered up by pretending to have a wild fit of asthma.

"Shut it, Fred," said Holly. He did. "I repeat, where are we?"

"Just under Ron's room," said George. "For the third time, stalking you?"

"If you see a strange boy, call the police," said Holly tiredly.

"The what?" asked Fred and George simultaneously.

"Those Muggles with badges," said Holly.

"Like Percy," said Fred.

"Not unless Percy packs a pistol. Wow, that's weird alliteration."

Seeing the twins' blank looks, Holly said, "A wand that Muggles use to kill each other."

"How stupid," said Fred.

"Stalking you?" said George yet again.

"Let it go, George," said Fred and Holly.

A tallish someone came down the stairs. A very familiar tallish someone. A very familiar tallish someone with black hair, green eyes, and round glasses.

"Hello, Holly," said Harry.

"Hey, Harry," said Holly. "Have a good summer?"

"Eh," said Harry. "A house elf was stealing my mail and nearly got me expelled."

Holly blinked and turned to look at the twins. "You could've mentioned that," she said.



“And I’m starved,” said George. “Let’s get lunch.”

[illegible]

Ginny came into the kitchen. "Holly, your cat up there is glaring at me, I thought it was winki-" she caught sight of Harry, sat down, and put her elbow in the butter dish.

The kettle of tea whistled, unhooked itself from the fire, and hopped over to Holly, scorching the floor as it went. Holly recognized it as the kettle that had taking a liking to the twins last year. It jumped on the table and blew steam into Fred's face. Then it happily served tea to everyone.

“Boys,” said Holly to the twins as Mrs. Weasley piled more toast onto everyone’s plates, “it’s good to be back.”

## Chapter 5

### Diagon Alley

Holly was sitting on her bunk reading a book Aunt Batty had sent on Animagi for her birthday. Ginny was scribbling on the last page of her diary. Kitty was currently wearing a politely interested face. All in all, it was very quiet.

Or at least it was until the door burst open. "Hello, Holls, Ginny," said Fred and George in unison. Holly sat up and stared at them. Ginny slammed her diary shut. "Mum says to get ready, we're going to get our stuff," said Fred.

"Get your list," said George.

"And make that cat stop staring at us," said Fred.

Holly looked at Kitty. Kitty looked back. Holly blinked. Kitty stared straight at her owner. "Almost like having a real cat," muttered Holly.

"Knock, next time," grumbled Ginny.

Fred and George made identical sweeping bows and stepped out, closing the door behind them. Ginny moved to her desk and seized her letter. "Pricey, this lot," she said to her self.

Holly swung down from her bunk and fished her own letter out of her trunk. "What's with all the Lockhart books?"

"Bet it's a witch," said Ginny. She ushered Holly out of the door.

The Weasleys and Harry were gathered in front of the fireplace. Mrs. Weasley was explaining to Harry the concept of Floo powder. Fred and George vanished in the green flames. "Holly, you next dear," said Mrs. Weasley.

Holly groaned and tossed some powder into the fire. The flames roared green again. She stepped in. "Diagon Alley."

Holly hated Floo powder. Her head spun and she became extremely nauseous. A thousand fireplaces roared in front of her. She closed her eyes and wished for it to stop...

And it did. She fell on her face out of the fireplace in The Leaky Cauldron. Fred and George tugged her up. "You look terrible," said Fred.

"I feel it too. I'm - I'm going to go puke," Holly said, and hobbled off in the direction of the restrooms.

When she came back, all the Weasleys were there and talking in panicked voices. She stepped up next to the twins. "Where's Harry?" she asked.

"He got off at the wrong grate!" said George.

"WHAT!?" yelled Holly. Several customers looked at her and she lowered her voice. "Well, where is he?"

"No clue," said Fred.

"Brilliant. He could be in Ireland for all we know," said Holly.

"No, no, dear, he's probably only gone one grate too far," said Mrs. Weasley. She didn't seem to believe herself.

"Nothing we can do except hope he turns up," said Mr. Weasley. "He'll be fine, relax Molly." He quietly ushered his wife out of the bar. Fred, George, Holly, Ginny, Percy, and a rather stressed out Ron followed them.

Outside, Diagon Alley was hopping. Kids anxious to get last minute school supplies were rushed in and out of stores by mothers. "Alright," said Mrs. Weasley worriedly. "I'll take Ginny to look for him. If Harry turns up, we'll head off to Gringotts. Stay with your father." She took Ginny by the hand and rushed her off down the street.

Holly looked around. She didn't see anyone from third year except for the ghastly Millicent Bulstrode, who resembled a hag. They did not greet each other. There was Harry's little friend with the brown hair.

And then the largest shadow Holly had ever seen. It was Hagrid, the Hogwarts game keeper. With him was a tallish twelve year old.

"Harry!" called Holly. The whole group moved toward him. His glasses were broken and he was partially covered in soot.

"Harry," said Mr. Weasley. "We *hoped* you'd only gone one grate too far..." He mopped his bald patch with a handkerchief. "Molly's frantic-she's coming now."

"Where did you come out?" asked Ron.

"Knockturn Alley," said Hagrid. Holly winced.

"*Brilliant!*" said Fred and George. Holly angled herself so she could step on each of their feet at once and did.

"We've never been allowed in," said Ron.

"I should ruddy well think not," growled Hagrid.

Mrs. Weasley reappeared with Ginny in tow. "Oh, Harry-oh my dear-you could've been anywhere-" She took a large clothes brush from her handbag and began sweeping soot off Harry. Mr. Weasley mended Harry's glasses with his wand.

"Well, gotta be off," said Hagrid. Mrs. Weasley was now wringing Hagrid's hand and thanking him profusely. "See yer at Hogwarts."

"Well, off to Gringotts now," said Mrs. Weasley.

Holly went rigid. Fred and George had never been in Gringotts with her. She had never told them about the small mountain of gold she shared with Harry. Aunt Batty didn't hold with bragging. Sure, they knew she had some money. That had been made obvious when she bought candy off the trolley on the Hogwarts Express. They just didn't know how much...

## Chapter 6

### Worried

Holly, needless to say, did not join in the excitement of the ride to Harry's and her vault in Gringotts. She was stewing over the little things. She didn't even crane her neck to see when Fred pointed out what looked to be fire from another passage. It didn't help that she was incredibly nauseous.

Harry seemed to be faring better than her. He too showed a pained expression when the Weasley's vault was opened. Nobody mentioned it.

The twins did not know Holly was rich. They never talked about it, and Holly knew the Weasleys were a slightly less wealthy family; she herself had bought Percy's glasses four years ago. It was an awkward subject.

When they got to the Potters' vault, Harry did his best to cover as much of the gold as he could, but considering the pile stretched high above both his and Holly's heads, it was a fruitless attempt. Holly dragged a pouch through a pile of gold Galleons, cinched it, and did not speak of it.

All the way back, Holly scolded herself mentally for fretting over something like money. The imaginary Aunt Batty in her head kept telling her strange things like, "It doesn't matter if you have a golden fish if you can't eat it," and, "Flint's folly was his loss for gold."

Outside Gringotts, they all split up. Harry, Ron, and Hermione went one way, Mrs. Weasley and Ginny another, and Mr. Weasley and Percy yet another. Finally Holly, Fred, and George were left in the center of a busy road.

"Oi, is that Lee?" asked Fred. He peered over the crowd. "Yep, I'll think I'll go find him." And he strode off toward their friend, casting George a knowing look.

Holly sighed. "I wish he'd stop doing that," she said.

“What? I can’t hear you,” said George loudly. There was a crowd of middle-aged witches around Flourish and Blotts who had started biffing each other with their handbags. “What’s that about?”

“Lockhart,” said Holly.

“Weird,” said George.

“Well can you blame them?” asked Holly. “I mean, he’s gorgeous.” George gave Holly a look that was part disapproving boyfriend and part disgust. Holly folded her arms in front of her chest and stared back at him. “I didn’t say I like him, I said he’s good-looking.” George still appeared slightly miffed so she seized him by the elbow and dragged him off in the direction Fred had gone.

In the time George and Holly had been conversing, Fred had restocked both his and his twin’s supply of Filibuster Fireworks. He had bought six batches of dung bombs with what pocket money he had left. He had bought Holly a pair of lime green socks that flashed navy blue when you were feeling strong emotion. He figured he could use said socks for more jokes. These socks he had bought with money borrowed from Holly in the first year.

Yes, it was fun being Fred Weasley. It was fun aggravating people and bugging his brothers and poking fun at his twin and their best friend. But Fred couldn’t help wondering if he and George had more potential. Making the Flaming Fudge had been a blast. Jumping off staircases had been fun. And who could forget his pet biting kettle? The very same kettle had overheard the breakfast conversation about Diagon Alley and served cold tea to everyone before it latched itself to Fred’s jeans. He and George had spent fifteen minutes prying it off.

At this point in time, Fred and George’s only chance of getting a joke shop was if Holly funded them. And that would most likely happen if they were all on good terms. And that would be more likely if Holly and George spent more time together, because they would have great memories together.

Fred Weasley was not greedy. He truly valued Holly as a friend. He was simply more concerned about the future than he let on.

“Hey, Lee!” he called. “Come look at these exploding underwear!”

## Chapter 7

### At Flourish and Blotts

"Hey Fred, what've you found?" asked George.

"Socks," said Fred proudly. He shoved them into Holly's hands. "Happy fourteenth birthday, Holls."

"My birthday was last June, but thanks anyway," Holly said. She picked up one sock and examined it.

"Yeah, but now George can't outdo me again," said Fred.

"Wasn't much to outdo, last time," said George. "What was it you got her? Fizzing Whizbees?"

"A classic," said Holly. She tucked the socks into her money pouch. "I say we get our actual school stuff now."

"Eh," said Fred and George simultaneously.

"I've got to meet up with my folks," said Lee. "I'll see you at school."

"See you, Lee," said the other three. Lee left.

In the next half hour, Holly dragged Fred and George all over Diagon Alley picking up supplies while they complained. She was used to this. The thing she was not used to was the strange man in the apothecary whose underwear seemingly blew up immediately after the trio had purchased potion refills. While someone Apparated him to St. Mungo's, someone else forced Holly, Fred, and George out of the shop while a team of wizards cleaned up.

"Well, that totally drove what was left of my appetite away," said George.

"How fitting," said Fred, "that it happened when we were in there."

"Ow," said Holly. She checked her list. "I've got my books, Aunt Batty sent them. You two need them and then we'll meet up with your folks."



They headed to Flourish and Blotts where a large sign was proclaiming that “Gilderoy Lockhart would be signing his autobiography today”. They quickly located the Weasleys because of the flaming red hair. Mrs. Weasley was fussing with her own.

“Guess what,” said Fred to Ron and Harry.

“Some bloke got his-“ started George, but at a look from Holly changed what he was about to say. “-rear blown off.”

“Exploding underwear,” explained Fred.

“Hush, Fred,” said Mrs. Weasley.

Lockhart appeared. Several women screamed. A photographer was hopping around with a camera that let off large blasts of purple smoke. Holly slid aside to avoid being stepped on.

“Harry Potter?” gasped Lockhart. Harry was shoved to the front of the crowd. The photographer clicked his camera even more excitedly. Holly wheezed and tugged Fred and George out of the line. She squeezed between the people and pushed the twins in front of the bookshelves. The boys reluctantly gathered their textbooks, but something caught Holly’s eye.

Completely ignoring Lockhart’s speech about himself and Harry, Holly lifted a copy of *A Hand Guide to Animagi: How To, About, and More*. Holly wondered for a second. No, that was stupid. How in the world could she pull off something like that?

Loud thumps filled her ears, deafened Holly. She felt someone grab her elbow, a thousand people were yelling, and she was hit on the head by something large and very heavy. Stars glistened in front of her eyes and everything slid out of focus.

## Chapter 8

### What Happened in the Apple Orchard

Holly shook her head hard. She had been smacked in the nose by *Recipes Every Witch Should Know: The Complete Potions Handbook*. Said book felt to weigh two pounds.

Hermione's grip on her elbow was cutting off her blood flow. The twelve-year old hauled Holly out of the shop to where a very angry Mrs. Weasley was yelling at her husband. Snatches of what she was saying floated back to Holly.

"Brawling...fine example...Gilderoy... thought..." raged Mrs. Weasley.

"What happened?" asked Holly. "I think that knock on the head made me lose it."

"Dad got in a fight with Lucius Malfoy," whispered Fred. Holly giggled.

The group passed Eyelop's Owl Emporium when Holly remembered. "I shan't be half a tick," she whispered to the twins and she dodged back through the streets. Three minutes after that, Holly rejoined them with a *Flourish and Blotts'* bag over her shoulder, panting heavily.

"Bookworm," muttered George, grinning. Holly smirked back and they said no more on the subject. Holly braced herself for the Floo trip back to the Burrow, knowing that she had just done something that could change her life.

The following afternoon found Holly hanging upside down by her knees from a high up branch in the orchard. Completely ignoring the blood rushing to her head, Holly put every ounce of her focus into *A Handbook to Animagi*. An apple hit the tree and smashed.

"Oi, bookworm," said a very familiar voice.

Holly looked down and saw the upside down figure of George. She swung herself right side up. In her scramble to climb down the tree, she dropped her book. George picked it up.

"A Handbook to Animagi," he read. He looked at her. "Not planning anything, are you?"

"I could ask you the same question," said Holly.

"You've got a huge bruise on your nose," George said.

Holly touched it and winced. George dug in his pocket and withdrew a small pot. He opened it and handed it to her. Holly examined it. "What does it do?"

"It makes your entire head shrivel to the size of a walnut and turn green," said George. Holly snorted. She rubbed some of the stuff on her sore nose and felt the pain melt away.

"Thanks," she said. She looked up and saw George with one knuckle between his teeth.

"Looks like we haven't worked out all of the kinks yet," he said lightly as he calmly removed the pot from Holly.

"George, what did it do?" said Holly. She felt all the blood drain out of her face.

"Well," said George carefully, yet he appeared to be vibrating from the effort of not laughing. "Your whole nose is blue."

Holly gasped and covered her nose with one hand, pulling the other into a fist. "Merlin, George, stop testing your stuff on me!"

"So, are you trying to become an Animagi?" asked George.

The question knocked Holly off guard. She considered George for a moment, George who knew most of Holly's secrets and had never told any of them, George who was her best friend and her boyfriend. And he would only think it a laugh if she managed to do it.

"Yes," she answered.

"Well, let's see it," said George.

"What?"

"Try it," said George.

"Now?" asked Holly.

"Yeah. I'll never give up a chance to see my girl turn into a goldfish."

Holly blushed. "A goldfish?" she asked, incredulous.

"Well how would I know what you're going to be?" asked George. He folded his arms over his chest. "Come on, sometime this month, if you please."

"Give me my book," said Holly. George tossed it to her and Holly opened the page she had been reading.

*Focus all your energy on becoming your animal. Imagine changing into that creature.*

Holly took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She focused and imagined. Her mind blocked out everything else; the orchard, George, the book. It all left her mind and Holly saw only herself, fur rippling, eyes changing, shrinking smaller and smaller...

A voice cut into her world. "Holls?"

Holly opened her eyes and knew instantly that something was different. She felt more balanced, poised, confident. It was as if she had lost all her teenage awkwardness. Her head felt easier to lift, for some reason.

Holly examined her hands. They seemed normal. She ran her fingers over her face and felt no fur. There was nothing new around her neck and shoulders either. However, there was something missing.

Holly's hands flew to her ears. Her once long hair now fell around her earlobes. It felt curlier. Holly cursed. "It didn't work, it just gave me a haircut," she said.

"Holls, I think that a haircut is the least of your problems," said George. He was clearly trying not to laugh again. When Holly looked confused, George pointed. Holly twisted around to see.

Just at the small of her back, a long dark red tail protruded from Holly's body. Holly gave a small scream and seized her book desperately. She turned pages rapidly to the part about undoing the transformation.

*Picture your human self coming from your animal form.*

Holly focused, praying so hard she was surprised George couldn't hear her. She felt her tail recede. Her hands went to her hair and found it had not changed. Nor had her feelings of gymnastic ability.

"Better," said Holly. George took her hand and began to lead her back up to the house.

"What were you trying to become?" asked George.

"A cat."

"A cat? Who're trying to be, McGonagall?"

"It was the first thing that popped into my head! And you can't do it properly unless it's an animal that you are like."

"And then maybe you're not like a cat."

"According to what it said in that book, that wasn't bad for a first try."

"You'd be a cat?"

"I think you'd be a monkey."

"And why would he be a monkey?" asked Fred who seemed to have popped up out of nowhere.

"Holly just tried to become an Animagus," said George.

"Really? What are you?" asked Fred.

"A cat," said Holly.

"Who're you trying to be, McGonagall?" asked Fred.

“We’ve been through this already,” yowled Holly.

“Little bit of cat in you, then,” said George.

Ron rounded the corner of the house. “Mum says it’s time for dinner,” he said. He peered suspiciously at George and Holly. “What were you doing? And why’s your hair all short?”

“Trying to get away from nosy little brothers like you,” said George.

“And she cut it in protest for the same reason,” said Fred.

“I’m telling Mum you were kissing down in the orchard!” cried Ron, and he ran back into the house.

## Chapter 9

### Hogwarts

“Okay, let’s try this one more time,” said Holly.

Having locked herself in the Weasleys’ bathroom, no one would interrupt. Being walked in on while turning into a cat would definitely put a damper on the beginning of school tomorrow.

Holly focused on the cat. She was now accustomed to the sensation of falling as she shrank. She opened her eyes and hopped onto the sink. She peered into the mirror.

A ginger cat with human eyes peered back out at her. The cat shuddered and jumped back onto the floor. Holly became Holly again.

There was a knock on the bathroom door. “Holls, it’s the middle of the night and you’ve scared Scabbers into the laundry basket,” whispered Fred.

“There’ll be plenty of time to practice becoming a cat at school,” whispered George. “Come help us find the rat.”

Holly peered into the mirror and made sure she was human again. She exited the bathroom and followed Fred and George downstairs.

“Good thing you’re not afraid of rats,” said Fred.

“Who do you know who’s afraid of rats?” asked Holly.

“Katie Bell,” said George.

“How do you know this?” asked Holly.

“Remember that time in second year when we joined the Quidditch team?” asked Fred.

“All the Slytherins kept trying to freak the team out,” added George.

“Yeah, that was when you truly became hilarious instead of funny,” said Holly. “Told Flint to do something unlikely with a slug.”

“Some moron snuck a box of Transfiguration rats into the locker room,” said Fred.

“And the rest is history,” said George.

“Alicia stepped on one,” said Fred.

“Its back end exploded or something,” said George.

“Biggest pile of guts I’ve seen in my life,” said Fred.

“And that includes when we accidentally turned Lee inside out,” said George.

“He’s still a little sore about that, actually,” commented Holly. “He was a bit put off when his liver fell out onto the carpet.”

“Loudest screams we’ve ever heard,” said Fred.

“Like a siren,” said George. Both twins stared off into space with dreamlike grins.

“You said that was Filch after Peeves,” said Holly.

“You threw up when we turned Lee inside out,” George pointed out.

“I was twelve,” said Holly.

“And now you’re fourteen. Not much of a difference,” said Fred.

“You both are fourteen too,” said Holly.

“Ah, yes, but we were born in the superior month of May, while you were born in June,” said George.

“So what’s your point?” asked Holly. “The last time you teased me for being one month younger was in first year.”

“Yes, but then you went and bought half the stuff in Zonko’s for us,” said Fred.

“It would have been low to continue after that,” said George.



“Fair enough,” said Holly. “OUCH! He bit me!” She held up a trembling rat with a drop of blood hanging off one whisker.

“Could be worse,” said Fred, taking Scabbers from her.

“Your nose could still be blue,” said George.

“It is,” said Holly.

“No it’s not,” said Fred.

Holly went over to the sink and splashed some water on her nose. Under a thick layer of powder, her nose was decidedly periwinkle. “Concealer,” explained Holly. “Great stuff.”

George shook his head sadly. “Getting more girly every day, Holls.”

“I’d like to see you walk around like you got in a fight with a Smurf,” said Holly.

Fred and George stared blankly.

“All my good comebacks are wasted on you,” said Holly. “And don’t talk to me about girliness until I’m running around in a freakin’ pink miniskirt.”

“Fair enough,” said Fred and George in unison. The three walked back up the stairs, deposited the rat in Ron’s room, and stood outside Ginny’s room.

“By the way,” Holly whispered. “I know you two slipped me your first samples of that sweet that makes you puke the day you turned Lee inside out.”

Fred started up the stairs, chuckling softly. George waited until he was out of sight, kissed Holly quickly, winked, and followed his twin up the stairs.

Holly grinned, shook her head, and ducked quietly into the room.

This proved useless.

Ginny sat at her desk, scribbling in a new diary.

“What’re you doing up?” asked Holly.

“I could ask you the same question,” said Ginny coolly. “Unless you were out for a midnight stroll with my brother-“

“Shut up,” said Holly flatly.

Ginny smirked in a very un-Ginnyish way. “Mum will kill us if she hears us,” she said. “Best get to bed.”

“Hear hear,” said Holly.

The two girls changed into pajamas. Ginny flicked out the light and got into her bunk. Holly climbed into hers and was nearly instantly hit with sleep.

The next day on the Hogwarts Express, Holly peered out of her window, waiting to see her brother materialize into Platform Nine and Three Quarters.

“How many seconds?” she asked Fred, who was keeping time with his watch.

“Nine,” said Fred.

“They’ll never make it,” said George.

Holly resisted the urge to swear loudly. She stuck her head desperately out of the window and yelled, “Hurry up!”

“Three... two... one,” said Fred. The train lurched under their feet. Fred’s biting kettle gave a great yelp and latched itself to Fred’s pants. Athena hooted disapprovingly.

“Holly, he’s fine,” George reassured her. “He’s a twelve year old wizard. Where’s he gonna go?”

“I guess,” said Holly. She managed to scrounge up a smile for the ride to Hogwarts.

When Harry didn't show up for the feast, she panicked. Holly alternated between picking at her food and gobbling it. When Lee told her she would give herself indigestion, she set down her fork and peered out of the windows. There appeared to be light off in the forest.

At the end of the feast, when they were all freed, Holly showed Ginny the shortcut up to the seventh floor and they spent a good amount of time waiting for the Prefects to show up with the new password.

Holly dragged Ginny to her dormitory, bowed out, and trooped back downstairs.

"Flying car!"

"Harry, will you sign my Daily Prophet?"

*Oh look, it's his sister!* thought Holly. She looked at Hermione. "Do I even want to know?" she asked. Hermione shook her head. Disgusted and feeling envious, Holly walked back up to her own dormitory. She opened Athena's cage and stuffed it under the bed.

"Holly Potter."

Holly made a noise like a startled cat and spun around. Katie Bell sat on her trunk, arms folded, knees crossed. She was in the universally recognized "I mean business" form.

"Katie," said Holly, intrigued.

"This is your last chance, Potter," said Katie. "You've got until June to give up. This year is the turning point."

"Good God, and I thought I had my hands full with Bullstrode," said Holly. "Katie, I've got no idea what you're talking about."

Katie bristled. She opened her mouth and Angelina walked in.

"Oh, don't tell me," said Angelina. "This is just like a scrub opera."

Holly rolled her eyes and got ready for bed. She sat up behind her red hangings until she was sure Katie was asleep. Then she crept out and was pleased to see a wide awake, waiting, Angelina Johnson.

“What’s she talking about?” Holly whispered.

“She likes George, of course,” replied Angelina.

Holly cursed under her breath. She seized Kitty, not trusting to leave it out in the open with a vengeful Katie, and ducked back into bed.

“Is fourteen worse than thirteen?” she murmured to the cat. Kitty’s face wore a wide eyed, betrayed expression.

## Chapter 10

Dear Aunt Batty,

Everything's just the usual at old Hogwarts. Fred and George let off a Dungbomb in the corridor and Filch gave them detention. Fred and George aren't sure why, it upset him for some reason. Filch keeps threatening to hang us by our ankles from the ceiling, or whip us, or set a dragon on us. But, being friends with anyone has its price.

Attie is acting really weird. I think she's building a nest outside my window. Do Hogwarts owls usually do that?

Thank you for the book. It was really bizarre, but it finally taught the twins how to start waterproof fires. I probably shouldn't have let them read it. I'd bet mine and Harry's entire Gringotts vault that something is on fire downstairs as I write this.

Harry is alright. He got lost when we went to Diagon Alley. Went one grate too far. Yet another reason to hate Floo powder. Hagrid found him, though.

We have a new Defense against the Dark Arts Professor. The twins and I think he's a bit of an idiot; he let a cage full of Cornish pixies loose in Harry's class. He's that Gilderoy Lockhart. You've heard of him, undoubtedly. A lot of the girls are going absolutely gaga over him. I think he's good looking, but I think that life with Fred and George has made me immune to swooning every time he gets anywhere near me. He absolutely dotes on Harry. It makes me sick. Yes, I know what you said about jealousy getting the better of me. It just... irritates me. He did absolutely nothing but cry that night, and I was the one who went for help. I'm protected too.

Holly winced and erased the last two sentences. Then she added her closing.

Hope you're well,

Holly

She rolled up her letter and put a little bit of string in her pocket, intending to go up to the Owlery for Athena to deliver. She stopped, however, when she glanced out her window. Sitting in the nest she had begun building a little over a week ago, was Athena, dozing.

Holly opened the window. "Hello, Attie," she said merrily.

The owl opened one eye and gave Holly an irritable glance. This was most unlike Athena, so Holly reached out and, despite Athena's protest, lifted her off the nest.

Sitting under a light layer of twigs were four perfect white eggs.

Holly dropped her letter. It landed on the edge of the windowsill, rolled a little, and dropped. Athena, looking petulant, swooped down, caught it, flew back up, and sat on her nest. She held the letter out to Holly, who set it on her bed. Then she scooped up the nest, ignoring Athena's screeches. She carried the owl and nest out of the dormitory, into the Common Room, through the castle, onto the grounds, all the way down to Hagrid's hut.

She knocked on the door and the booming bark of Fang answered. Hagrid opened the door. "Lo, 'Olly," he greeted her. "Ow are ya?"

"Fine, thanks, Hagrid," said Holly.

Hagrid peered at Athena. "Sommat wrong with yer owl?"

"She's laid eggs," said Holly. "I didn't know that Hogwarts owls do that."

"They don't, normally," said Hagrid, lifting Athena off the nest. "None o' that," he told the owl when she tried to bite him. "Come inside, and I'll have a look."

Holly set the nest down on Hagrid's enormous table. Athena flapped away from Hagrid and sat back on her nest.

Hagrid reached under the owl and pried away one of the eggs. He held it up to the light. "They could be empty, o' course," he muttered. "Nope, there's sommat in here."

"Weird," said Holly. She stroked the top of Athena's head to try and calm her.

"She musta been gravid over vacation," said Hagrid. "Ye haven't been here that long."

"The only other male owls she's been around are Errol and Hermes," said Holly, feeling the color drain from her face. "And she tried to kill Errol one more than one occasion."

"Hermes, then," said Hagrid. "Whose owl is that?"

Holly answered by leaning over and banging her head against the table.

Hagrid identified that only three of the four eggs had owlets in them. He returned them to Athena, who clicked her beak at him angrily.

"What'll she do with the blank one?" asked Holly.

"Eat it, probably," replied Hagrid.

On that note, Holly said, "Thanks, Hagrid. I have to go hunt down the in-law."

Hagrid chuckled as she left.

Holly had made it back up to the seventh floor when she found Fred and George hiding in a secret passage behind a suit of armor.

"What're you doing?" asked Holly.

"Hiding from Percy," said George. "He's trying to give us a lecture on responsibility." He looked at Athena. "What's up with Attie?"

Holly leaned over and whispered in his ear.

“HE WHAT?” George yelled.

“What?” asked Fred.

“Hermes,” sighed Holly. “Percy’s owl is the father of Athena’s eggs.”

At that moment, Percy barged into the passage. “There you are,” said Percy. “I want to talk to you.”

Holly fell to her knees, threw her hands in the air, and moaned, “Why?”



## Chapter Eleven

### Why You Should Never Listen to the Twins

#### Holly's Point of View

"I'm never helping you escape again," I muttered.

"We thought you'd be able to talk to cats," whispered Fred.

"Which was a serious lack of judgment on our part," whispered George.

"And why would she be able to talk to cats, Weasley?" asked Filch.

"I didn't say anything about cats," said George quickly.

"Yeah, he said bats," said Fred. "The ones at the feast. They love her."

I narrowed my eyes at them and dipped my rag in the bucket of soapy water.

A lesson to you, my readers: never test a portable swamp in a hallway. This was prototype one and we were sitting with buckets and rags and half of a mop, scrubbing at the sludge. Thank god Filch let us use magic to deal with the crocodiles.

When Fred and George had come running down the hall, I should not have helped them. We should not have taken the shortcut out of they way. I should have known the stupid cat would find me. Note to self: avoid other cats.

That's a bonus. Being me, most rats are terrified of me, even when I'm a human. It works on all rats except Scabbers, who is just weird that way. It cleared off the swamp rats, which were driven up into the Owlery. I know I should feel bad about that, but I don't. I bet that's the cat.

There's something totally cool about being part cat. I felt better about my entire life, which was weird. I didn't get nearly as annoyed at Harry doing strange things as I should have, and Alicia didn't bother me as much as she should have, and I felt confident, something usually reserved for flying.

And speaking of flying things, Athena had been sitting up on the nest all day. Hermes had been hunting for her, and my mail had been put on hold, except for one person.

Aunt Batty stopped sending pigeons. Her ancient owl, Foxglove, had passed away over the summer. She rented one from, believe it or not, Rent-An-Owl, a branch of the post office for senior witches and wizards. Nice of them to think of that stuff. Her letters were printed, because she couldn't hold a quill with her arthritis. She wrote about what was going on in town, and she invited me to come see her during Christmas.

I scrubbed a bit of slime away from the wall. "Got to make it more resistant," I muttered. Fred nodded as he dipped a bucket into the swampy lake.

"Not if we're cleaning it up," said George as he strained to uproot a small tree. "Give me a hand with this."

I dropped the rag and tugged on the tree. It didn't budge. I reached for my wand.

"No magic, Potter," said Filch.

In my head, I wished him a painful death. I dug away a bit of the mud at the base of the tree. A hole opened under my fingers and I caught a glimpse of scales. I jumped back, the snake slithered out, and Fred dropped the bucket on its head.

"Who put snakes in this?" I demanded.

"Lee," said George. "Thought you knew."

The backend of the snake wriggled grotesquely. I whipped out my wand against Filch's protests, and muttered, "Decapitate." There was a snap and the snake stopped writhing.

"Detention, Potter," said Filch.

"That wasn't a spell," said George.

I blinked and looked up. The twins' faces were filled with horrible understanding. I gave them the Look of Death and pulled at the tree. It came away loosely.

Once the fish were out of the lake and swimming with the giant squid, six more trees had been yanked up, and another snake had been stepped upon, Filch realized he didn't have the authority to hold us in during the Halloween feast. We took the long way downstairs.

"You're afraid of snakes," whispered Fred.

In three seconds, I had him pinned to the wall with my hand around his throat. "I am not."

"Let him go, Holls," said George. "Friends don't strangle friends."

I let him go. He jumped out of my reach and said, "You're afraid of snakes, and it freaked you out. You did magic without meaning to."

I swallowed a retort. "I don't like them, okay?"

"Fine," said George. "Explain how you chopped its head off."

"Decapitate means chopping someone's head off," I said. "I just did it, I didn't think."

"We think it was cool," said Fred. "The beheading part, I mean."

"It's like you made up your own spell," said George.

"I did not," I said. "I just..."

“...Chopped its head off,” said Fred. “Holly, the executioner. Try that for Halloween.”

“She who kills with pure will,” continued George. “I bet that’d be an Unforgivable Curse.”

“It was just a snake!” I protested. “Just a snake! Forget it, alright!”

“We don’t forget anything,” said Fred.

“Just useless stuff, like exams,” said George.

We were on the stairs to the second floor when I felt it, like a buzzing in my ear and down my spine. I stopped.

“What?” asked Fred.

A little voice whispered to me, Go that way. Hey, you, help me.

“I think I just heard a voice in my head,” I whispered in shock.

The twins exchanged glances. “I think you pushed her off the deep end, Fred,” said George in awe.

“Holly, that snake didn’t bite you, did it?” asked Fred.

“No,” I said. “This way.” I dragged them down the corridor.

We saw it. I blinked.

I think I summed up the scene in one sentence: “Oh my God.”

The little voice whispered again, sounding irritated. Really, could you get me down from here?

Mrs. Norris was talking to me.

I heard the twins’ voices as if from the other end of a long tunnel.

“I think we should go for help,” said Fred to George. “What say you?”

“Yeah,” said George. “Holly, come on.”

“What’s she saying?” asked Fred.

There was a pause. “She’s saying the cat is talking to her,” said George, as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

“Oh,” said Fred.

“Holly,” said George in his best talking-to-crazy-people voice, “What’s the cat saying?”

I couldn’t say anything.

“Should we slap her?” asked Fred.

“Worth a shot,” said George.

There was a stinging sensation as I came back to Earth. I blinked, closed my mouth, and rubbed my cheek. “Thanks.”

“Okay,” said Fred. “What was the cat saying?”

“The cat says to get her down from there,” I said, then realized how psycho I sounded. “Let’s get help.”

“For you or the cat?” asked Fred.

I cuffed him around the head. “The cat, thank you very much.”

“She’s fine,” said George.

“How do you know?” asked Fred.

“She hit you,” said George.

“Violent tendencies,” agreed Fred.

“Shut up,” I said.

We ran down to the Great Hall. opened the door and we slunk in quietly. Everybody was too focused with their food to pay attention to us, which I was glad of. We walked up to the staff table and stopped in front of Dumbledore.

“Miss Potter,” he greeted us, “Mr. Weasley, and Mr. Weasley. Is there a problem?”

“Someone wrecked a second floor hallway,” I blurted, “And they did something to Mrs. Norris.”

“Please, define ‘wrecked,’” said Dumbledore kindly.

“They wrote on the wall in blood,” said Fred.

“And they hanged Mrs. Norris from a torch bracket,” added George.

No one ever accused us of beating around the bush.

“Well,” said Dumbledore. “Could you show me, please?”

I nodded, feeling eyes on my back.

We led the Headmaster past the Gryffindor table. I caught Ginny’s eye and nearly stopped.

She was staring coldly at me, her face bloodless, and her eyes empty. There was something white on her robes. It looked like a feather. Probably from an owl. I dismissed Ginny’s behavior for the moment. There was a bigger issue. I looked back and saw Professors McGonagall, Snape, and Lockhart following us.

We walked up to the corridor where Mrs. Norris hung. Dumbledore swept over to her and detached her from the torch bracket and began examining her. Lockhart began rambling.

“It was definitely a curse that killed her,” began Lockhart.

“She’s not dead,” I said quickly.

Professor McGonagall looked at me imperiously. “How do you know that, Miss Potter?”

I stammered out something that sounded like, “I-I-I heard-my-head-voice.”

Everybody stared at me like I was crazy. George elbowed me. “I heard her in my head,” I repeated.

“You heard her in your head,” said Professor McGonagall slowly. I nodded.

“You are correct, Miss Potter,” said Dumbledore. “She is not dead. She is merely Petrified.”

“Ah! I thought so!” said Lockhart. Fred and George cast him withering looks.

“Mr. Weasley, would you be so kind as to fetch Mr. Filch?” asked Dumbledore.

Fred and George looked at each other, and then engaged in an entirely silent three second argument, which Fred lost. He hurried off to find Filch. As soon as he was out of sight, there was a large bang and the sound of running footsteps. Fred reappeared around the corner, apparently being chased by Filch.

“What, that took him all of two seconds?” I whispered to George.

“He still hasn’t broken a record,” whispered George.

Filch spotted the crowd. "What did they do, Headmaster?" he asked. Then his gaze fell upon Mrs. Norris. "They murdered my cat! They murdered my cat!"

"We did not!" I protested.

She is not dead, Argus," said Dumbledore. "Please, all of you, come to my office."

"We know the way," said Fred, and we trailed off.

In Dumbledore's Office:

Filch was clutching his petrified cat, McGonagall was staring at me curiously, Snape, I was certain, was watching me out of the corner of his eyes, and Lockhart was babbling about a cure for hearing voices in the head. Dumbledore was sitting at his desk, and Fred, George, and I were standing, feeling like we were about to be executed.

"Miss Potter, could you please explain how you came across the scene on the second floor?" asked Dumbledore.

I recounted what had happened, omitting the discussion about snakes we had had on the stairs.

"I see," said Dumbledore. "Hearing voices of animals is not common, but it is not unheard of. Tell me, do you hear Mrs. Norris now?"

I listened. "No, sir."

Fawkes the phoenix made a noise. I wondered if he was agreeing with me.

"Indeed," said Dumbledore. "Well, please inform me should this happen again. You and Mr. and Mr. Weasley may go."

"Actually, Headmaster, I would like a word with Potter," said McGonagall. "Potter, please meet me in my office."



I nodded. The twins and I left.

